

Vail Daily

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Bringing Communities Together



Megan Rossman
Red Sandstone Elementary
Thunderstorms
High 74; low 47
See Weather, PAGE B32

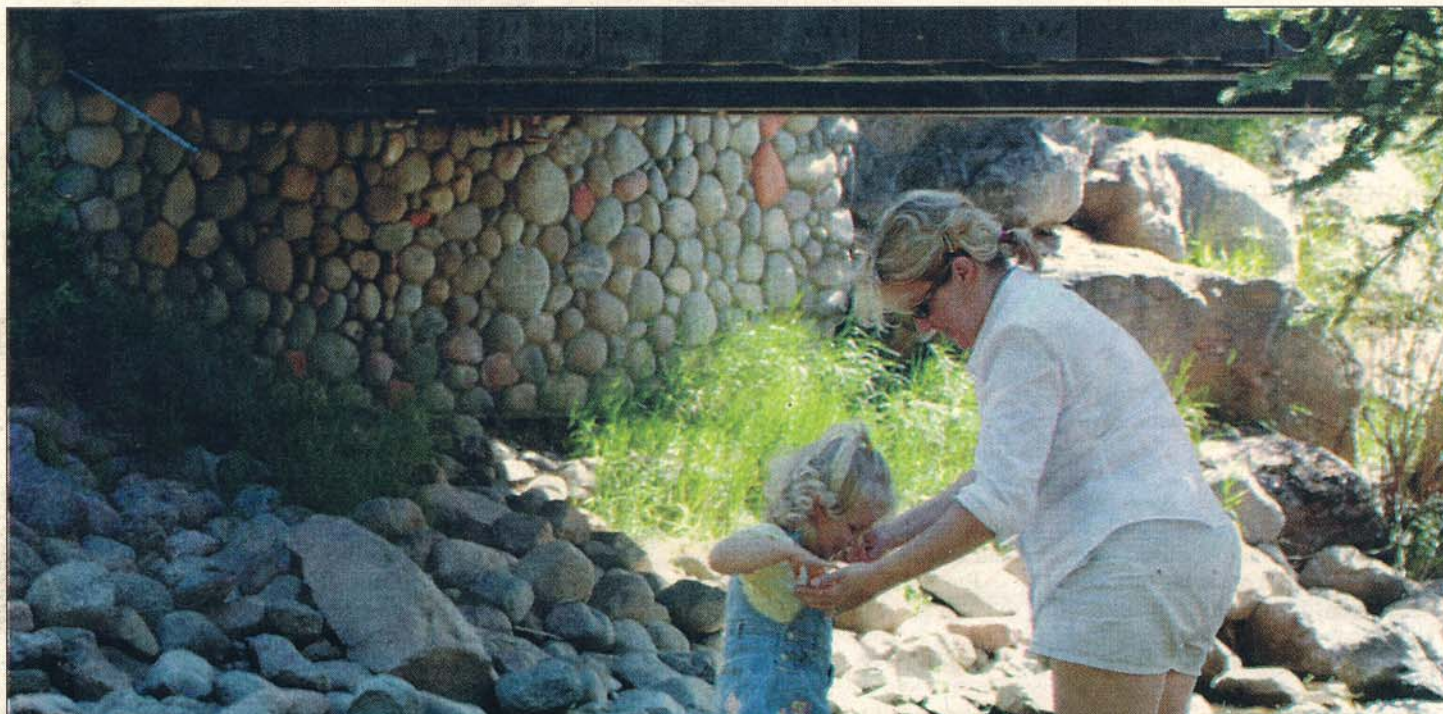
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Minturn's river being revived

■ A \$1.1 million, mile-long river restoration project on the Eagle River in Minturn is completed this week, paid for by fines levied against Viacom, the owner of the Eagle Mine. Mine pollution in the '80s and '90s killed seven miles of river through Minturn.

PAGE A3

DOWN BY THE CREEK



Minturn river project starting to take hold

It's up to Mother Nature to fill in the blanks

By **Cliff Thompson**
DAILY STAFF WRITER

When Kris and Kelly Wyatt look out their living room window over the Eagle River in Minturn, they like what they see.

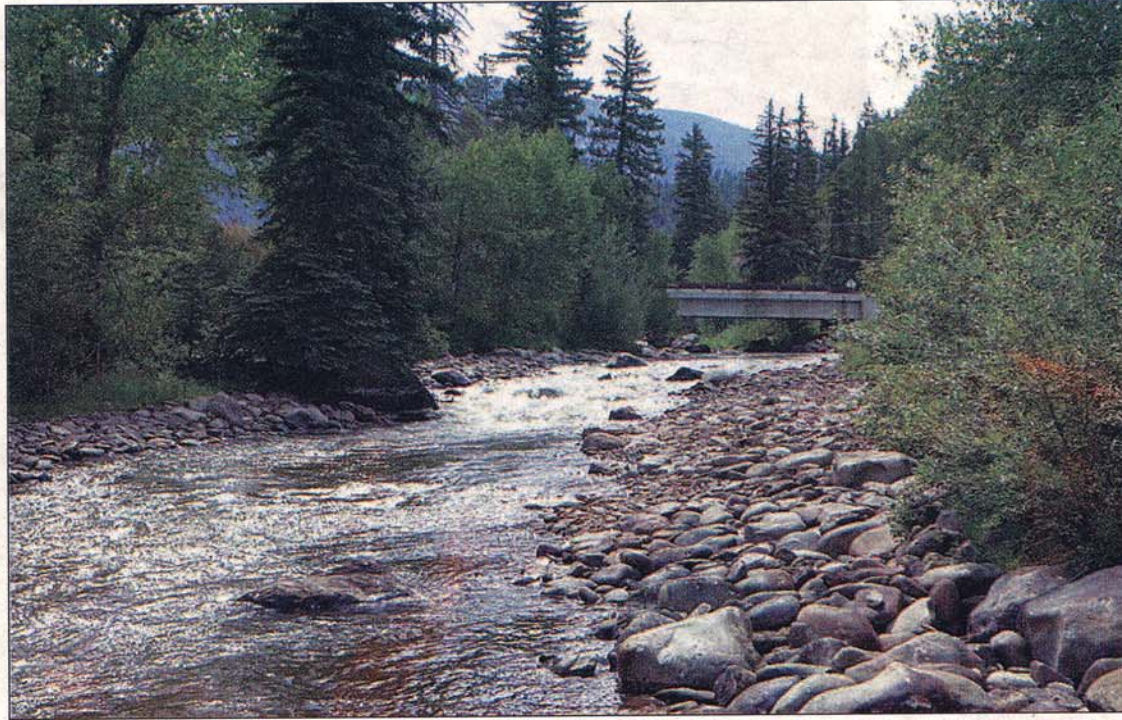
Their new home is right in the middle of a \$1.1 million, mile-long river restoration project completed this week and paid for by fines levied against Viacom, the owner of the Eagle Mine. Mine pollution in the mid '80s to the early '90s killed seven miles of river through Minturn to its confluence with Gore Creek at Dowd Junction.

In the last year, the Wyatts said they've noticed more fishermen using the river, which had been reshaped and revegetated to return it to a healthier state.

"I like it because if there's more plant life, the river is healthier," Kris said. "I've lived on the river for 12 years and there's a lot more aquatic insects."

The Wyatts are some of many who have been enjoying the "new" river, and town leaders are hoping the resurrected waterway will attract more fishermen, kayakers and others users to Minturn.

The project should also create more habitat to replace that lost to nearly 100 years of channeliza-



Daily file photo

The Eagle River channel through Minturn has been narrowed and deepened to improve and diversify the aquatic habitat.

tion, pollution and run-off sedimentation caused by man's use and abuse.

Project engineer Troy Thompson of Ecological Resource Consultants said the restoration has turned out just as he had hoped.

"It's good to see the way the river held up," he said. "All the structures are just where they need to be."

The project required hand planting 34,000 native shrubs and

trees, most of them armored with beaver-proof mesh, Thompson said. It also required moving 15,000 cubic yards of rock and river cobbles — 1,500 dump trucks' worth — to reshape the river so it has more pools and a deeper channel. None of the river material was removed from the river channel, he said.

Where the river channel was narrowed, crews created vegetated terraces that will flood during

snowmelt and will improve habitat. Some of the new trees — including cottonwoods and conifers — are nearly 25 feet tall.

Crews also stabilized a portion of the river bank along the northeast side of the river near the railroad track that was eroding into the stream, Thompson said.

The new plants will be watered this year, and water quality and stability of the restored section will be monitored for the next

“
Now that the habitat has been improved even more, we just need to deal with the zinc.”

Caroline Bradford
EAGLE RIVER
WATERSHED COUNCIL

three years, he said.

"The critical thing is the vegetation," he said. "That will hold things together as it takes root."

Later this month, officials from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment — who oversee the project — will do a final "walk-through" of the project with contractors and town officials.

The project has been hailed by the Eagle River Watershed Council, a river watchdog group.

"I think the mature trees and grass they planted is beautiful and I can't wait to see how the river will behave in normal high-water conditions," Bradford said.

But she feels there's another important element to further cleaning up the river.

"Zinc levels in the water through Minturn appear to be the biggest problem," she said. "Now that the habitat has been improved even more, we just need to deal with the zinc."